

Report of Site Visit Findings:
DRS TANF Employment Initiative

January 13, 2002

Prepared for the:

*Virginia Commonwealth University
Center for Public Policy
Survey and Evaluation Research Laboratory*

By the:

*Virginia Commonwealth University
Rehabilitation Research and Training Center
On Workplace Supports*

*Contact Person for Report:
Grant Revell, VCU RRTC
P.O. Box 842011
Richmond, VA 23284-2011
wgrevell@smail1.vcu.edu
(804) 828-6989*

Table of Contents

	PAGE
Background	3
Study Methodology	4
Overview of Study Results	5
Responses to Questionnaire and Follow-up	7
Population/Program Description	7
ESO Relationship with DRS and LDSS	12
Resources Factors That Help/Hinder Success	14
Characteristics of TANF Recipients That Help/Hinder Success	15
Success Stories	16
Relationship of Project to TANF Work First Policy	19
Recommended TANF Policy Changes	19
Summary	21

Report of Site Visit Findings: DRS TANF Employment Initiative

Background

This investigation focused on employment practices in the eight projects in Virginia that are managed by the Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS), in cooperation with the Department of Social Services (DSS), as a part of the interagency TANF Employment Initiative. This study was a collaborative effort between Virginia Commonwealth University's Center for Public Policy (CPP) and VCU's Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Workplace Supports (RRTC). The purpose of the study was to identify effective employment practices for use with persons with disabilities who are beneficiaries of Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF).¹ DRS contracted with Employment Service Organizations (ESOs) to administer the eight projects. The ESOs work in partnership with local Departments of Social Services (LDSS) and DRS staff, along with a variety of other community agency and resources, to provide employment services to TANF recipients with disabilities.

The goal of the eight DRS TANF projects is to facilitate the personal and economic independence of TANF recipients with disabilities. DRS initiated the projects in October, 1998 by issuing a Request for Proposals (RFP) aimed at establishing contracts to acquire pre-employment, job placement and job retention services from vendors for persons with disabilities who are TANF recipients living in Virginia. Of the eight current DRS TANF projects, seven were funded through the 1998 RFP. DRS funded the eighth project in 2001 through a second solicitation process for the TANF Employment Initiative. The eight ESOs funded by DRS and their primary service areas are as follows:

Funded ESOs	Geographic Area Served by Projects
• Richmond Goodwill	Metro Richmond area
• Northwestern Workshop	Winchester area
• SOC Enterprises	Northern Virginia
• Goodwill Industries of the Valleys	Metro Roanoke area
• Louise Eggleston Services	Norfolk and Virginia Beach
• Career Support Services, Inc.	Southwest Virginia
• Worksource Enterprises	Charlottesville area
• Service Source, Inc.	Northern Virginia

The eight ESOs funded by the DRS TANF Employment Initiative are local, not-for-profit agencies that provide a variety of employment-related services. These ESOs have vendor agreements with DRS as well as contractual arrangements with local entities such as Community Services Boards (CSBs), Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs), and local Departments of Social Services. The ESOs provide services such as situational and vocational assessments, work experiences, job placement, and job retention. The ESOs work closely with local employers and,

¹ The term persons with disabilities refers to an individual who has a physical or mental impairment that constitutes or results in a barrier to employment for that individual.

in some cases, with the United States government to make employment opportunities available to their clients.² This provides clients with opportunities for both short-term work experience and also longer-term employment. Further, some of the ESOs have agreements with WIBs to serve as job information and placement centers as a part of a One-Stop system.

Study Methodology

The VCU RRTC received a contract from the VCU Center for Public Policy to conduct a study aimed at identifying effective employment support practices for TANF recipients with disabilities. In collaboration with staff of CPP's Survey and Evaluation Research Laboratory and representatives from the TANF programs at the DRS and DSS state offices, the RRTC developed a questionnaire booklet to gather information related to the employment service practices in the eight DRS TANF projects. The questionnaire focused on seven topic areas:

1. Description of population served and services provided
2. Relationship of ESO to local DRS and DSS staff
3. Factors helping or hindering the projects
4. Participant characteristics facilitating or impeding success
5. Success stories for project participants
6. Relationship of project to TANF Work First policy
7. Recommendations for TANF-related policy changes

The questionnaire and instructions for its completion are included as Appendix 1 to this report. The questionnaire was formatted so that it could be transmitted and completed electronically. A two step process was followed in this study for gathering information. The first step involved the completion of the questionnaire booklet itself. The questionnaire and instructions for its completion were sent by email to DRS TANF project managers at the eight funded ESOs in early May, 2002. The RRTC representative for this study contacted each of the project managers by phone to review the questionnaire. Each ESO project manager was asked to take the lead in completing the questionnaire in close collaboration with local DRS and DSS representatives (and other key community partners) involved with the TANF Employment Initiative. All questionnaire booklets were completed and returned to the RRTC by early June.

The second step involved telephone follow-up with each of the local projects to review and expand on the information contained in the responses to the previously completed questionnaires. In addition, RRTC staff made site visits to the following five projects:

- Goodwill Industries of the Valleys
- Louise Eggleston Services
- Career Support Services, Inc.
- Worksource Enterprises
- Service Source, Inc.

² The Federally funded contracts are made available to Employment Service Organizations on a competitive basis through NISH (National Industries for the Severely Handicapped). Examples of NISH funded contracts to ESOs in Virginia include the restocking the shelves at a military run commissary/exchange or providing laundry services for a military operation.

Site visit locations were chosen in consultation with DRS and DSS. The five sites selected provided a mix of urban and rural oriented projects located in the Northern, Southeastern, Southwestern, and Central areas of Virginia. The site visits involved interviews with the ESO TANF project staff and with community partners from DRS, LDSS, and other resource programs and agencies. Telephone and email follow-ups were conducted with community partners not available during the site visits. Follow-up with the remaining three projects were conducted by telephone and email only. It is important to note that the study design did not include interviews with individuals who are TANF recipients. Therefore, findings are based totally on the input of the ESO TANF project staff and their community partners.

Overview of Study Results

The eight DRS TANF projects have a common goal – employment and job retention for TANF recipients with disabilities. The projects all work within the federal and state policy framework governing the employment of TANF recipients and services to individuals with disabilities. However, the projects are also quite diverse. Some projects are located in communities where the targeted TANF populations are highly concentrated; others serve communities covering a much wider geographic area where populations are more dispersed. Some are working with very strong local economies with readily available job opportunities; others are working in more economically depressed areas. Some are working in communities where support services such as transportation and One Stop Employment centers responsive to the TANF recipient with a disability are well developed. Others face constant issues around accessing needed transportation services and have One Stop centers not yet equipped to be fully effective partners in a TANF employment initiative.

While there is variation in employment practices across the eight DRS TANF projects in response to local conditions and resources, the questionnaire responses and follow-up site visit and interview process established a number of very clear themes across the DRS TANF projects. These themes are as follows.

First, the DRS and LDSS community partners view the services offered by the ESOs to TANF recipients as critically important to the employment success of these individuals. Individuals who are TANF recipients with disabilities face multiple challenges to achieving successful employment outcomes. The supports and services needed by this population require more individualized, constant, and intense attention than LDSS and/or DRS can provide directly. One DRS counselor described the services of the ESO as his “eyes and ears” in working with the TANF population. The service coordination, one-to-one supports, and work-related assistance provided by ESO staff to TANF recipients helps fill a gap in the existing DRS and LDSS service capacity. The services provided by ESOs effectively complement the core services provided by DRS and local Departments of Social Services.

Second, all of the projects use multiple strategies to simplify the interagency referral process and service coordination. Joint intakes, co-location of staff, thoughtful scheduling, frequent team meetings, and informal information sharing are strategies that are used by all the

projects to help ensure that the referral and service coordination process is streamlined and integrated. Strategies are chosen that match local opportunities and service structures. In communities where the One-Stops have evolved to become effective resources for the TANF recipients, co-location occurs at the One-Stop centers. In other communities, joint intakes occur at the LDSS office. Frequent team meetings and email and telephone updates keep the ESO, DRS, and LDSS partners up-to-date on the TANF participants' progress and response to services.

Third, the ESO, DRS and DSS partners are working closely to address issues related to differences in policies and procedures across agencies. For example, in terms of timeliness and pace of services, the Work First policy of DSS for TANF recipients can conflict with the eligibility process requirements of DRS. In the TANF projects, ESO staff help expedite the DRS eligibility process by getting clients to needed appointments. To expedite the DRS eligibility process, LDSS provides background information to DRS counselors, including diagnostic information. Some projects are using joint referral forms. Also, a number of DRS counselors are not requiring that DRS eligibility and planning processes to be completed with a client prior to the initiation of employment services by the ESO. All eight ESO contracts allow ESOs to assist these clients immediately, without waiting for DRS eligibility to be completed. By expediting the development of employment service plans, the projects respond proactively to the TANF Work First policy.

One DRS counselor described how he “catches-up” with the DSS emphasis on rapid movement to employment by sometimes writing an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) for his TANF clients who are already working at the time the IPE is completed. It is important to note that there are still tensions in some communities among the project partners regarding perceived differences in the philosophies and practices of the DRS and Social Services systems. These tensions are noted in the “Recommended TANF Policy Changes” section later in this report. Overall, the ESO, DRS and LDSS partners in the DRS TANF projects have developed effective approaches to interagency collaboration.

Fourth, the ESO staff and their partners use multiple strategies to respond to the employment requirements of DSS . Projects are using a wide assortment of assessment tools and practices to help identify needed employment supports. Some are emphasizing work experience early in the project. All are using some form of life skills training to help participants develop coping and problem solving skills. There is unanimous agreement among the projects that the Work First emphasis can impede the employment success of project participants. Each project is attempting to balance efforts to identify and address employment barriers prior to employment with the need for the TANF recipient, particularly those that are nearing the end of their eligibility for TANF benefits, to move rapidly into employment.

Fifth, the consensus among the project partners is that the one-to-one life coaching done by the ESO staff is the most important service offered to the TANF recipients. The ongoing life coaching provided by projects is a combination of case management and service coordination, job coaching, crisis intervention, and individualized life skills training. It is marked by continuous support that is consistent, responsive, and readily available. For example, an ESO staff person identified “her time” as the most valuable resource she offers the project

participant. The time of professional staff to help participants' problem solve, build a personal relationship, and respond quickly to problems and issues is a highly valued resource for helping TANF recipients with disabilities achieve successful employment outcomes.

Sixth, ongoing supports that continue well after the initial job placement are a key employment service for the TANF recipient. There were numerous references to the need for multiple job placements for many project participants. Many initial jobs are lost because the TANF recipient is unprepared to deal with issues that arise once employment begins. Work skills develop through job experience and through the support of the DRS TANF project staff. Also, an understanding of job preferences evolves over time as project participants gain more work exposure. Finally, many initial placements pay low wages. Subsequent to their initial job placement, TANF recipients frequently need assistance in moving into higher wage and more stable job longer term job opportunities.

Responses to Questionnaire and Follow-up Contact

The six themes summarized above for the DRS TANF projects come directly from the responses to the questionnaire and the follow-up interviews with the project partners. The specific input received from projects is summarized as follows for each of the seven topic areas in the questionnaire.

SECTION I: Population/Program Description

Key characteristics of the TANF recipients referred to the DRS TANF Projects and criteria for project acceptance: All projects note the multiple and varied characteristics of the TANF recipients referred to the projects. As identified in the following table, project participants exhibit a number of disabling conditions and also a variety of community and life issues. It is important to note that frequent reference is made by project staff to the fact that disabling conditions among TANF recipients often are previously undiagnosed and that many TANF recipients show limited awareness of the presence of a disability.

Characteristics of TANF Recipients with Disabilities	Examples
Presence of a Disabling Condition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - mental health issues - substance abuse - learning disabilities - borderline intellectual functioning - orthopedic impairments - health related disabling conditions
Presence of Community and Life Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - domestic violence - lack of childcare - criminal backgrounds - limited education - limited or no work histories - substandard housing and/or homelessness

Characteristics of TANF Recipients with Disabilities	Examples
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - debt - parenting issues

Overall, respondents consistently describe the population being served as individuals facing multiple employment barriers. They have a variety of disabling conditions, experience multiple issues in their lives that adversely impact employment, and have limited experience and skills in how to effectively address these issues. The following statement from one of the respondents captures the overall descriptions of the population served by the projects:

“The most significant characteristic displayed among TANF clients are their lack of community and life coping skills.”

Receipt of TANF benefits and the suspected presence of a diagnosable disability that adversely affects an individual’s ability to obtain and maintain employment is the primary criteria noted for eligibility for DRS. Acceptance into the DRS TANF projects is also influenced by an individual’s need for employment-related services and interest in receiving these services through DRS.

Primary assessment tools used to develop a fuller understanding of an individual’s disability and its impact on employment: A variety of assessment tools are used by the projects. The assessment tools vary considerably across the eight projects. The following are examples of assessment tools identified by various project sites.

Project Location	Sample Assessment Tools Utilized
Eggleston	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Holland Interest Inventory - Keirsev Temperament Sorter - Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE),
Service Source	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Situational assessments at community worksites - TABE to assess reading - The Washington State Department of Social Services Learning Needs Screening Tool to help identify learning disabilities; follow-up referral for neuro-psychological assessment is made frequently when indicated by the learning needs assessment

Service Source is a good example of how resources available to TANF participants vary considerably from project to project and also within the same project, based on community-of-residence and the availability of complementary services. In the Service Source project, all consenting TANF recipients living in Fairfax County receive learning disability screening under an existing Bridges-to-Practice project serving TANF recipients in Fairfax County. Neuro-psychological testing is provided to all Bridges to Practice TANF recipients who score within a certain range on the Washington State Learning Needs Tool. This additional testing helps to further identify learning disabilities, developmental disability, cognitive impairments, and the

presence of mental health problems. Service Source project participants not living in Fairfax County do not have access to the Bridges-to-Practice resource.

Many of the project sites also assess participants for domestic violence and/or substance abuse issues. DRS is a primary source of assessment information, and ESO TANF staff frequently help the DRS counselor in securing assessment information. The ESO staff will provide TANF recipients with transportation to their appointments and staff follow-up to help secure needed services in a timely manner. Frequent reference is also made to use of situational assessment at competitive job sites. A wide range of assessment tools and processes are being used across the eight projects to help identify challenges, aptitudes, and preferences for each participant served.

Primary strategies used to identify individual and family specific barriers to work: The importance of close communication among project partners was emphasized in identifying and sharing information on barriers. To gain information about participants' challenges and to help build rapport, project staff use a variety of techniques, such as:

- home visits
- one-to-one interviews
- group sessions
- sharing of information and staffings with other project partners (once a consent form has been signed by the client).

A few of the ESOs, such as Eggleston and Northwestern Workshop, utilize their work programs as assessment opportunities to gain information about the participant's performance, response to work issues, interests, and attendance. For example, the participant might work for a period of two to eight weeks in an ESO job site. At times, the individual and family barriers that would have surfaced potentially when the individual went to work are experienced during the work experience program, and the staff can respond and help eliminate the barriers or help the participants learn how to deal effectively with the barrier before actual employment begins.

Primary strategies to develop an employment plan focused on the TANF recipient's job preferences: Frequent reference is made to working closely with each participant to review work histories and the results of situational assessments to determine the preferred type of job and work atmosphere. Team meetings involving staff from the ESO, DRS, and LDSS also take place. Respondents for the following reasons frequently emphasized the continuous nature of the job planning process for TANF project participants:

- Initial job placements are frequently job trials that serve to sort out both the interests of an individual and the employment barriers that surface when work actually starts.
- The need for multiple job placements is emphasized, with job preferences evolving largely through actual work experience.
- The need for multiple job placements for many project participants is viewed by project staff as being strongly influenced by the very limited work history of most TANF recipients, the push for rapid movement into employment for project participants in response to the TANF Work First policy, and the enhanced ability of

some participants to take on more difficult job duties after they acquire work experience through their initial job placements.

Primary employment preparation strategies leading to employment: Many of the projects use a variety of life skills training programs. Life skills training can be obtained from community partners or provided directly by the ESO. Examples noted by respondents included the following:

Project Location	Sample Life Skills Training Approach
Richmond Goodwill	Utilizes Empowerment Workshops that offer life skills training along with information on money management and budgeting
SOC	Uses project funds to purchase the Fundamental Life Actions for Independent Rewards (FLAIR) program from Industrial Concepts of Northern Virginia (ICON). FLAIR is a formal life-skills training program. It involves a combination of classroom training along with individual appointments with a life-skills trainer in the TANF recipient's home
Career Support Services, Worksource Enterprises and other project ESOs	Directly provide life skills training through their own project staff and use job preparedness training classes and workshops that use role playing to help prepare for interviews with employers, prepare resumes for use with job applications, and practice problem solving skills (such as anger management).

With individual participants, prescriptive planning is done to address job issues such as dress, personal hygiene, and attitude towards employment. DRS-sponsored job clubs are used in some projects. DRS TANF project staff sometimes take part in job interviews with potential employers. Some ESOs, such as Northwestern and Eggleston, arrange temporary work experiences to help with planning for more permanent job interests.

Primary strategies used to help TANF recipients develop coping skills needed to address personal, family, and/or work issues that are potential threats to successful employment: The following strategies were referenced frequently:

- Life Skills training programs
- Mental Health services, with these services being provided at times by the private sector, with payment by the LDSS or through DRS, if the services cannot be accessed expediently through CSB programs
- Community partnerships such as the HIV/AIDS awareness and other programs offered through the Norfolk Health Department and the domestic violence program operated by the Roanoke County DSS through a grant from the state DSS.

With individual participants, prescriptive planning is done to address personal and family issues that could adversely impact employment, such as making plans for emergency childcare and transportation and encouraging proactive budgeting. Emphasis is placed on one-to-one work with the TANF recipients and coordination among the ESO, LDSS, DRS, and other community partners with regard to service delivery.

Primary services provided once the TANF recipient is employed: A variety of ongoing support services are provided after employment. Job coaching is frequently provided. Although visits to the client's job site do occur, project staff noted that the frequency is low. As a group, TANF recipients appear reluctant for project staff to visit them at their job site, in part because of worries that employers would react negatively to staff visits to the workplace. The more intense ongoing support services are provided away from the job site and involve regular contact and meetings focused on problem solving activities. Issues that threaten job security such as a lack of transportation and/or childcare are addressed. Assistance is sometimes provided to complete employment verification for the LDSS. Ongoing support also involves exploration of additional training that might lead to job advancement.

Primary factors that determine how long post-employment supports are provided to the TANF client: Ninety days is the minimum amount of time that the TANF client is followed post-employment.³ A few respondents referenced a maximum of 180 days of post-employment support.

Primary factors that determine need for ongoing support are as follows:

- TANF recipient's problem solving ability and coping skills
- Cyclical nature of post-employment issues, such as changes in childcare and transportation needs
- Need for ongoing assistance to improve employment status and income as former TANF recipients adjust to the cessation of TANF benefits.

Need to assist project participants with multiple job placements for them to achieve their employment goals: All eight TANF DRS projects find that multiple job placements are frequently needed for project participants. One of the respondents provided this representative explanation of the need for multiple job placements:

“YES, for two different reasons. One is because people do not understand the purpose for the program and keep leaving jobs without learning appropriate job skills/behaviors. The other is because they get a survival job first and then a job they really want later.”

The need for assistance with multiple job placements is viewed as a critical employment service for many TANF recipients because of both attitude and behavior issues that adversely impact job stability. Additionally, clients may voluntarily opt to change jobs after developing a sense of job preferences that evolves from actual work experiences.

³ This is a DRS requirement for ESOs that received funding through the TANF Hard-to-Serve initiative.

Methods used to track and assess the TANF recipient's progress:

- Weekly and monthly attendance reports, data sheets, and progress logs
- follow along services for 60 days after employment
- case narratives
- frequent communication and team meetings among core partners
- interviews with participant and sometimes with employers.

Criteria used to determine when a TANF recipient completes the project: Project completion occurs when there is long term job retention and a demonstrated ability to successfully address employment, emotional, family, and financial issues as they arise. Except in situations where services are terminated as a result of non-participation, many projects indicated that they provide support until the client requests that services be terminated.

SECTION II: ESO Relationship with DRS and LDSS

Lead agency in determining if a TANF recipient is an appropriate referral for the project and basis for that determination: The local Departments of Social Services initiate the referral to the DRS TANF project. A LDSS VIEW worker is the most common source of referral. The presence of a diagnosed or suspected disability is the primary criteria for referral by LDSS.

Strategies used by the ESO, DRS, and LDSS to simplify the cross-agency referral process for the TANF recipients: A variety of cross-agency referral strategies are used. Joint intakes by DRS and project staff of referrals from LDSS are routinely conducted in six of the eight DRS TANF projects. In addition, Career Support Services, a project covering a multi-county, extended geographic area in southwest Virginia, conducts joint intakes where possible. The project at Northwestern Workshop is implementing a joint intake process as well.

Additional cross-agency referral strategies include:

- Joint team meetings
- scheduling appointments with DRS at times when the participant is also with the ESO project representative
- providing transportation to activities needed for DRS to complete its eligibility process
- use of a consolidated referral form incorporating information needed by all partners.

Goodwill Industries of the Valleys, Eggleston, SOC, and Service Source co-locate their staff at LDSS offices and/or at One-Stop Centers. Some projects cover a large geographic area and are working with multiple local Departments of Social Services, such as the Career Support Systems project in Southwest Virginia. In situations where co-location of staff is prohibitive, emphasis is placed on scheduling referral appointments at predetermined times where the DRS counselor is routinely present at a particular site.

Primary characteristics of the TANF population who are most frequently referred to DRS:

For the most part, across the eight projects, all participants referred to the ESOs by the local Departments of Social Services are referred to DRS unless the TANF recipient chooses not to apply to DRS for services.

Primary services provided by the Department of Rehabilitative Services:

- Diagnostic assessment of disability, which may include a psychological and/or vocational evaluation
- Vocational counseling and guidance
- Purchase of necessary tools or uniforms
- Job clubs
- Transportation
- Assistance with job-related accommodations, and
- Assistive technology.

Primary services provided/supported by the local Departments of Social Services:

- Funding of additional support services (e.g. transportation, housing, and childcare)
- Food Stamps and Medicaid
- Emergency services (e.g. heating bills, food, clothing)
- Job readiness training by VIEW workers. (e.g. how to fill out an application, how to interview for a job).

In addition, specialized services through the LDSS are also referenced, such as the domestic violence program in Roanoke County and obtaining cars through the GREAT Wheels for Work program in the City of Richmond.

Key community partners other than the ESO, DRS, and LDSS and the services provided by these partners: Most frequently referenced partners are local providers of Adult Basic Education and the Community Services Board for mental health and substance abuse services. Additional partners varied widely across the eight projects. Examples of the partners include:

Project Location	Sample Community Partners
Winchester area	Access Independence provides case management services, including working with recipients to determine if there are hidden disabilities.
Northern Virginia	ICON and St. Johns provide life skills training.
Norfolk area	Therapy Center and Community Psychological Resources offers training on abuse recognition and how to be an effective employee.
Charlottesville area	JAUNT provides transportation services and participates actively in the project's management team meetings.
Southwest Virginia	People, Inc., a community action agency, assists

	individuals who have been employed for 30 days to purchase a car with a low interest loan.
--	--

Strategies used by the ESO, DRS, LDSS and other community partners for improving services: Team building and other joint trainings are used to expand awareness of the impact of disability on employment. For example, the project in Southwest Virginia sponsored a “Crossroads” interactive training with all project stakeholders designed to improve communication, cooperation, and integration of employment-related services for TANF recipients.

The ESO, DRS, and LDSS develop coordinated work plans for each DSS catchment area served by the projects. These agreements address key partnership areas such as how referrals will be made, the services that will be provided by each partner, and plans for service coordination and information sharing.

SECTION III: Factors that have helped or hindered service delivery

Factors that have *helped* DRS TANF project participants be successful in achieving positive employment outcomes:

- Collaboration among interagency partners with emphasis on co-location of staff at One-Stop Centers and ongoing team meetings
- Life Skills Training
- Intensive case management focused on identifying barriers and promoting employment strengths.
- Access to medical and mental health services
- Access to community and financial supports such as GED classes, childcare assistance, and transportation vouchers.

Factors that have *hindered* TANF project participants from being successful in achieving positive employment outcomes and strategies used by projects to address these issues: The DRS TANF project participants and project staff face a number of service and resource challenges. Respondents identified a number of these challenges and also described the strategies used to overcome each. Factors hindering employment success and response strategies used by the projects include:

Factors <i>Hindering</i> Success in Employment	Response Strategies by TANF Projects
Difficulty in finding jobs that pay above minimum wage	Building partnerships with employers and providing ongoing job search and replacement assistance to help project participants' move beyond initial minimum wage jobs as they establish themselves as productive, dependable workers.
Lack of transportation options in more rural	Job search assistance to help participants find

Factors <i>Hindering</i> Success in Employment	Response Strategies by TANF Projects
project areas and an overall lack of transportation for participants with non-traditional work schedules (e.g., evenings and weekend hours)	employment opportunities that matches their child care/transportation needs
Lack of funds to pay for unusual problems such as tickets/fines	Ongoing efforts to build partnership across key stakeholder agencies and community partners to help secure support for addressing financial hardships experienced by TANF recipients
Time involved in DRS eligibility process can hinder compliance with TANF's work-first mandate.	ESO staff providing assistance to DRS in facilitating eligibility process by providing transportation assistance to appointments
Referrals to the DRS TANF project are made only after the individual has failed in job search and other VIEW-related services or a referral where the individuals is nearing the end of his/her TANF eligibility	Training with LDSS workers to emphasize the importance of early intervention and referral to DRS TANF projects. This includes training on disability awareness.
Lack of mental health resources because existing resources are overburdened	DRS finding mental health services in the private market
Lack of child care during non-traditional work hours and for children who are sick and/or have special needs	Intensive one-to-one case management focused on finding day care providers who will provide services during evenings and weekends, with LDSS helping to arrange payment for these services.
LDSS appointment requirements for employed TANF recipients conflict with individuals' employment schedule.	LDSS adding office hours during non-traditional times to provide appointment alternative for people whose employment schedule coincides with traditional LDSS office hours

SECTION IV: Personal characteristics of the TANF recipients that have helped or hindered their ability to achieve successful employment outcomes

Personal characteristics that have *helped* TANF project participants: Each TANF project participant brings to his or her search for employment a unique personal set of attitudes, experiences, and potential resources. The following characteristics of TANF recipients were identified as being helpful in achieving positive employment outcomes.

- Coping skills/resilience/problem solving skills
- Presence of some work history
- Presence of some education and training, particularly a high school diploma/GED
- Family support around employment, particularly family-based child care assistance
- Familiarity with community resources
- Willingness to actively participate in employment-related activities
- Desire to provide for self, children, and family independent of public assistance
- Positive self-image and sense of self-worth

- Ability to establish good rapport with people providing services and support

Personal characteristics that have *hindered* TANF project participants and strategies used by DRS TANF projects to address these issues: Many DRS TANF project participants have a number of personal challenges that interfere with their achieving successful employment outcomes. Respondents identified a number of these characteristics and also described the strategies used to overcome each.

Personal Characteristics <i>Hindering</i> TANF Project Participants in Achieving Employment Outcomes	Response Strategies by TANF Projects
Impulse control problems, including anger management problems in responding to family issues	Provide anger management training and, role playing in anticipation of problematic situations; reinforce continually what is learned
Undiagnosed/untreated mental health issues	Utilize mental health services
Complicated family problems, including lack of family resources	Provide intensive case management support to assist with problem solving and ensure that staff have knowledge of community resources
Limited coping and/or social skills	Emphasize use of Life Skills training
Continuous child care issues/lack of personal/family resources to address child care needs	Encourage participants to accept employment opportunities in which they have the means to be successful in (for example, don't take shift work if adequate child care is not available)
Substance abuse and/or medical issues	Utilize substance abuse and medical service resources in the community. Work closely with DRS and LDSS to help access needed resources
Limited education and training	Utilize Adult Basic Education and GED resources
Limited or no work history	Utilize situational assessments to help identify good job matches; utilize job preparation and community-based work experience programs to help develop workplace essential skills.
Intergenerational poverty and use of public assistance; limited interest in working/poor work ethic	Work with the LDSS office to maximize time allowances within the TANF policies so that pre-employment time can be on counseling, skill building, and job readiness training
General lack of trust in service delivery programs	Be consistent and responsive in word and behavior with TANF recipient
Criminal backgrounds/ongoing issues with the law, including outstanding fines and judgements	Refer project participant to Offender Aide and Restoration for assistance and follow up on use of needed services
Limited money management skills/debt	Utilize Life Skills Training and provide intensive coaching services to assist with money management

SECTION V: Success Stories

Each of the eight DRS TANF projects submitted success stories in their survey response. The three success stories presented in this report are representative of a number of characteristics found consistently in these projects.

1. Project participants frequently face multiple barriers to employment. Most are experiencing multiple disabling conditions, many of which have gone undiagnosed or minimally treated. They also are facing a variety of personal, family, and community issues.
2. Each story demonstrates the importance of the ESO, LDSS, and DRS partnership in the TANF projects, along with the outreach to other community partners.
3. Each story points to the importance of the one to one coaching and support provided. Individualized “life coaching” is the core employment support provided through these projects.
4. Achieving employment outcomes for many TANF project participants frequently involves the provision of post-employment support services. These supports deal with issues that threaten job security. Support services also allow the participant to use their initial employment success as a building block to clarify longer-term job preferences and as a path to the higher paying jobs.

To protect the identities of the individuals described in the success stories, names have been changed and specific program identifiers deleted.

Success Story 1

Barriers to Employment: Ms. Roberts is 37 years old. Her disability is the result of repeated strokes occurring two years ago that resulted in no peripheral vision (constituting legal blindness), minimal use of left arm, and short term memory deficits. She also experiences difficulty with concentration and attention; difficulty writing; difficulty with language processing and expressive language; and computational skill deficits. Additional barriers to employment included homelessness with no private transportation or reasonable commute via public transportation from the location of temporary housing; a 15 year old child of her own and legal guardianship of a 1 year old grandchild born to 17 year old daughter; ongoing childcare needs for her grandchild; and food-stamp benefit overpayment due to cognitive deficits, leaving her with currently diminished benefits because of repayment requirements.

TANF Project Interventions to Date: Primary DRS TANF project interventions for Ms. Roberts include: co-located joint intake (DRS/ESO); referral to the Department for the Blind and Visually Handicapped for safety training for peripheral vision deficits; assistance in moving into transitional housing; referral for and receipt of psychological testing; location of available free child care for 1 year old grandchild while 17 year old daughter attended school; resume development; interviewing skill development; and development of compensatory strategies to structure and organize personal and financial responsibilities.

Outcomes to Date/Employment Status: Ms. Roberts is employed as a receptionist/assistant within walking distance of two-year, temporary transitional housing facility. She eventually grew to trust the employment development specialist, from whom she continues to receive support.

Success Story 2:

Barriers to Employment: Ms. Martin is a 37-years-old. She has significant medical issues including obesity, asthma, fluid retention, and knee and ear problems. In addition, she has mental health issues. She was diagnosed with depression and possibly a bipolar disorder. She dropped out of school in the 9th grade, but went on to get her GED. She has four children, ages four, seven, 12 and 15. Her four-year-old son has been diagnosed with bipolar disorder and has been violent and abusive towards her. He was hospitalized and placed on several medications during her participation in the DRS TANF project. Her boyfriend, the children's father, intermittently lives with her and was emotionally and sometimes physically abusive towards her.

TANF Project Interventions to Date: To help her address her low self-esteem, she was referred to self-esteem building workshops and was provided with daily encouragement, support and praise. She had very good communication skills and a positive attitude about her work history and job knowledge. To ease the many barriers faced at home, she admitted to sometimes drinking. She and her family were referred to the DRS and to family counseling. She was also connected with a support group for her drinking and she received assistance in addressing the mental health needs of her four year-old son. She participated in several Empowerment Workshops and was provided ongoing supports from project staff and DRS.

Outcomes to Date/Employment Status: She found employment at a bank with a salary of \$26,000 a year. Due to her weight problem, she needed a job that allowed her the flexibility to stand and sit as needed. Project staff have intervened several times during her employment tenure because of poor attendance and punctuality. Ms. Martin has been employed for over four months now and often calls to say thanks and to obtain words of encouragement and/or support from project staff.

Success Story 3

Barriers to Employment: Mr. Jones is a 44-years-old and has one daughter, age five. He and his daughter were homeless at the time of the initial intake to the DRS TANF project. He has a learning disability and a history of substance abuse when he was between the ages of 16 and 42. He has worked at several jobs, but has had difficulty with job retention. Some of his job losses were due to his learning disability and lack of social skills. His academic skills in both reading and math fall well below functional levels. He had also undergone intestinal surgery and reported having arthritic pain in his back, shoulders, knees and toes that also affected his ability to work.

TANF Project Interventions to Date: To address his lack of housing, DRS TANF project staff worked closely with the DSS Family Preservation Worker in order to obtain housing assistance and additional financial and social support. DRS assisted in the diagnosis and treatment of his degenerative bone disease. He was issued a weekly travel voucher through DSS to be used in getting to and from work, and in the near future, he will obtain a Smart Tag pass that will be renewed monthly as long as he continues to maintain successful employment. He received a psychological evaluation to assess his mental state and assist in vocational planning and development, and he received counseling on substance abuse. LDSS assisted him in obtaining stable childcare so he could pursue permanent employment, and the DRS TANF project staff

contacted a local elementary school and assisted him in accessing early morning childcare. The DRS TANF staff also assisted him with his job seeking and application process.

Outcomes to Date/Employment Status: He has been working for approximately six months in a clerk position with a government agency. He receives ongoing counseling with regard to job retention strategies and problem-solving around issues that occur on and away from the job site. He is in supported employment and receives ongoing support at the job site.

SECTION VI: Relationship of Project to the TANF Work First Policy

The questionnaire asked for the projects to describe how they responded to the TANF Work First policies. The TANF Work First policies strive to balance time limits on receipt of TANF benefits and work requirements with services needed for the TANF recipient to acquire work, retain it, and advance in employment. The response to this question was consistent across the eight projects, and the following points are representative of the responses from the projects.

- All projects follow the Work First mandate but also try to emphasize employment preparation services to help participants develop positive work behaviors and problem solving skills.
- Concern exists that the work first mandate is not conducive to helping the TANF recipients advance into anything more than entry level employment. Moving project participants quickly into employment frequently results in high turnover.
- The Work First mandate reinforces the need for early referrals of TANF recipients from LDSS to the DRS TANF projects. Referrals made when the TANF clock is running out severely limits the opportunities available to incorporate preparation services into the work plan.
- Frequently, first-time job placements are survival jobs used to respond to the work first mandate. They help participants identify longer-term job preferences and they also help hidden barriers to employment surface. These initial survival placements are followed by placement in more desirable jobs.
- The medical exemption is a very useful opportunity for providing job preparation services.

SECTION VII: Recommended TANF Related Policy Changes

The questionnaire asked for recommendations on TANF policy changes. The recommendations received addressed issues related to TANF's work first focus, the need to extend the supports available to project participants beyond the current contract period of the projects, and a variety of other policy areas. The following policy changes were recommended:

Policy Area	Comment Reported in Questionnaire
Provide additional staff training	More training for LDSS workers on disabilities, more training for DRS counselors and ESO staff on TANF policies.

Policy Area	Comment Reported in Questionnaire
Expand use of Medical Exemptions	Provide Medical Exemptions for people who need mental health treatment; psychologists need to be able to approve medical exemptions.
Stop VIEW clock during diagnostics and planning periods	Stop the recipient's VIEW clock during the time diagnostics are being scheduled/conducted/reported and a treatment or accommodation plan developed.
Provide more time for basic education and allow for educational activities to count as work activities	For recipients with limited reading and writing ability, there should be provisions to allow for the time necessary to acquire these skills. Also, the VIEW program for educational activities should allot more "countable hours" provisions. Under the current scenario, TANF participants are allowed only 8 "countable hours" per week toward education and training for higher paying jobs, with a requirement for 22 work hours per week. Without educational opportunities for those who are capable of higher levels of educational attainment, accessing employment with earnings above minimum wage is unlikely.
Adjust DRS eligibility process to be more responsive to DSS Work First policy for TANF recipients.	DRS eligibility process can slow down access to DRS services needed for TANF recipients to go to work and cause conflicts with TANF 's work first policy. DRS eligibility is a lengthy process. Most of TANF clients (because of their hidden disability of LD/emotional issues) require assessments/evaluations before they are DRS eligible. Clients are more concerned with getting to work as soon as possible (because they are mandated by the VIEW program) than making their DRS appointments for there assessments. In order for DRS and DSS to become more successful in welfare reform, they must have greater compatibility in their policies.
Provide for the health insurance needs of uninsured children	Uninsured children are another concern. Many of the TANF clients, if they are lucky enough to find full time employment, cannot afford to purchase health insurance for their children. Many other states are effectively using the Family Insurance for Medical Assistance Services (FAMAS). The Commonwealth is severely under utilizing these funds.
Shorten time needed for DRS to complete an Individualized Plan for Employment	If DRS is going to withhold services until the completion of an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE), then complete the IPE in a more timely fashion.
Recognize importance of case management services for TANF recipients	Implementation of a program of proactive case management supports to identify and solve important work-readiness issues on behalf of the participant prior to requiring him/her to participate in employment activities is important. This could include medical case management to address important medical issues and/or involvement by a case manager to help the client address issues such as domestic violence, substance abuse, transportation, and child-care. Case management could facilitate stability in the home, thereby resulting in improved potential for success in employment. This concept closely correlates

Policy Area	Comment Reported in Questionnaire
	with the vocational concept of "work readiness."
Incorporate case management into fee for service plans	If the grant project is going to turn into a fee for service system, DRS will have to recognize the need for case management services. They are ESSENTIAL to the success of this population!
Expand use of supported employment with TANF recipients with a disabilities	TANF Policy should incorporate a fee-for-service mechanism to ensure the continuance of supported-employment model services for TANF recipients with disabilities. This model would promote the availability of services such as those available under the TANF Projects, including and situational assessments, job readiness, life skills training, case management, job development, job placement, and JCTS (job coach training services), and follow-along services.
Expand use of Social Security Disability benefits for TANF recipients with a disability who cannot achieve a living wage	Not all customers served by the TANF DRS project will be capable of working at a level allowing earnings sufficient to meet living wage. Employment at maximum levels may result in only minimum wage jobs. Social Security Administration benefits should be explored to provide customers with a "safety net" that encourages work while also providing access to an alternative to TANF benefits. Identification of funding to assist customers with more severe disabilities to access Social Security benefits should be considered.

Summary

This study served to identify a number of employment practices critical to the job success of the TANF recipient. Although these practices vary widely at times across the eight project sites, employment supports offered through the DRS TANF projects do consistently encompass core themes in serving the TANF recipient with a disability. These themes are:

1. Engage the TANF recipient from the point of referral through joint intakes involving partners that embrace a one-stop philosophy.
2. Identify, address, and continually reassess individual and family-related barriers to employment throughout each individual's participation in the project.
3. Develop job goals that reflect individual preferences, and acknowledge that job preferences will likely change as the participant gains work experience.
4. Emphasize opportunities to provide pre-employment services while recognizing the need to move rapidly into employment.
5. Support job mobility and job growth.
6. Stay close to the TANF recipient throughout the employment process and provide continuing assistance well after movement into employment.
7. Work consistently to build a trusting, responsive relationship with the TANF recipient.

It is important to note that when the move is made from contract funding of these projects to a fee-based funding structure, DRS and DSS must develop a service definition and payment structure that maintains the core services offered through the DRS TANF projects. The contract

funding mechanism used with the DRS TANF projects has offered the ESOs and local DRS and DSS offices a high degree of flexibility in determining the timing, intensity, and content of services provided by the ESO staff for each project participant. In response to the TANF' Work First focus, the DRS TANF contracts have allowed the ESOs to initiate employment-related support services from the point of referral from LDSS and to provide a variety of services while DRS determined eligibility.

The timing of services is critical to the eventual employment success of the TANF recipient. The contract-funded DRS TANF projects have become effective resources for DRS, DSS, and LDSS to assist TANF recipients with disabilities achieve positive employment outcomes. The contract-funded services have not been dependent on the availability of a service authorization issued by DRS after completion of an IPE. ESOs have largely been able to respond to the employment and related service needs of the project participants without the constraints sometimes experienced when individual service authorizations are required. In fee-based arrangements, DRS usually authorizes purchase of employment-related services after the development of the IPE, and the ESO will potentially have to wait to provide employment supports to the TANF recipient until the DRS authorization is issued.

In establishing a fee-based arrangement to continue the core TANF project services, DRS and DSS must complete the following steps:

1. Define a purchasable service(s) that encompasses the critical life coaching described in this report.
2. Define a purchasable unit for the service (e.g. an hour of service; a defined outcome).
3. Establish a cost for that unit.
4. Determine if there are necessary services to augment the core service (e.g., Life Skills Training) and make provisions for their inclusion in a fee-based reimbursement structure.